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THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs) AND GRASS-ROOTS COMMUNITIES

by
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Association de Conseil Gestion aux Initiatives des Communautes de Base (CONGAT/ICB)

LC/NAIROB

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFRICA

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"Dig deep into yourself, for from within comes all that is good and if you keep digging, good ever new will gush forth."

Reflexions of Marcus Aurelius - 7, 59.

"Within yourself is to be found all that there is in the world".

Origen

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-five years after independence, African countries are still fighting to improve the living conditions of their people, of their rural folk in particular. This official statement reflects the deep and persistent crisis which African society is undergoing. The crisis has placed most people in a position where their vital needs are not met and they cannot adapt to the proposed pattern of development.

However, it is precisely those people who are doomed by the system to despair and to a slow death who provide the first cause of hope in that they are, by their deeds, becoming the authors of their own development, creators of the conditions under which they live and of a world in which life is made possible for all. People are reaching back into their common memory which constitutes the basis of their hope for the future and the grass-roots creativity thus unleashed is not only mushrooming but being co-ordinated more and more.

A second reason for hope is taking shape in the sustainment, by social leadership structures, of economic reforms that are being expressed in business ventures that show that people are moving on from words to figures.

No less a reason for hope is derived from the initiation by African and international governmental organizations (as witness the findings of the African Symposium on Grass-roots Development held in Niamey in 1987) of contractual relationships under which NGO operations are properly co-ordinated. The realization is that development through administered planning should allow for and give place to participatory planning.

So much for hopes. As for NGO experiences, these will be reviewed in the three parts of this paper being submitted as a humble contribution.

Grass-roots communities: the view of this paper is reflected in the identification and promotion of local initiatives which, if they should last, should be based on stable organizations that enjoy complete autonomy.

If development activities are to be rooted in the heritage of people then they must participate culturally and historically in that endeavour.

NGOs are considered in this paper as business partners and associated businesses.

When refering to grass-roots communities, all the strata of the population they cover are designated.

Experience teaches, however, that women and young people play a role in the development of such grass-roots communities. Women in particular play a crucial role in what have been termed informal organizations and additional family revenue enterprises which, in times of distress, constitute the major means of survival.

As with women, young people invest their energies in what have been termed marginal, peripheral, informal and even deviant undertakings when compared with the norms legitimized by the system.

If such a contribution could be of some use it would be a pleasure, but it becomes a joy because of the hope that grass-roots communities inspire. Such institutions as village development associations, co-operatives and groupings are as mortal as human civilizations and often, in the field, their mortality rate can be calculated. We do know, however, that the dead are not dead and that the true mark of life is not to last but rather to be reborn.

My special thanks go to Prof. Adebayo Adedeji, Executive Secretary of ECA, for inviting me to present this paper.

In carrying out this assignment, I have been helped by friends from all walks of life.

My feeling now is one of thankfulness. A thankfulness freely yielded in reciprocation and homage. Because such thankfulness liberates us from any calculation, it forms the symbol of our commitment to serve our fellow Africans and our continent.

Akpalo Kouassivi
CONGAT/ICB

A. POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

I. The concept of grass-roots development

1. Observation

In light of the fact that development planning experience (dating from 1966) has not made for an improvement in rural living standards, it has became necessary to accord greater importance to the principle of grass-roots development.

The concern to programme projects whose implementation would directly address the expected needs of people and to promote small-scale projects using local initiative has become a matter of urgency for national planning officials.

These are the terms in which the Togolese authorities couched their new development option in 1985.

The general theme of the African Symposium on Grass-roots Development held in Niamey in June 1987 presented the situation in the following terms:

Twenty-five years after independence, African countries are still fighting to improve the living conditions of their people, of their rural folk in particular....

Generally, the economic and social development plans and programmes of the past were overly focused on micro-economic objectives. Currently, the inefficacy of such policies to promote grass-roots development should be pointed out.

The experiences of African countries such as Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Mali and the Niger show what those countries had undertaken with a view to effecting grass-roots development. Nevertheless, all the indications are that peoples participation in development remains poor probably because there are no appropriate mechanisms instituted to achieve effective integration.

2. Towards the new concept

The new approach to development define by the Niamey Symposium takes the aforementioned observations as a point of departure and introduces the notion of power as a dimension of the issue. Not only is it a fact that local communities constitute the majority of the population and yet have no effective power but also the are dominated in their relationship by those who do.

The new concept put forward by the Niamey Symposium raised the concept of grass-roots development to the level of strategy and advocated it to be an option for African society. That option obviously implies that decision-making responsibility at all levels, in particular the political, economic and technical, should be shared.

This is more than explicitly stated in the consideration of grass-roots development as a complex and continuous process of activities aimed at meeting the ever-growing material, moral, social and cultural needs of the population.

It requires the involvement of grass-roots people in all decision-making and the making of them into motivated and active partners.

This development option overtly and resolutely challenges the explicit or implicit thinking of the classical development models which have led Africa into the current crisis.

It adopts a far more positive approach by stressing the qualitative aspects of development. Development should involve mankind as a whole, influence his life-style as it is, in turn, influenced by his conception of culture-specific.

In that regard, grass-roots development is based on four major characteristics:

(a) It aims at meeting the basic needs of the majority: material needs in terms of goods and services and also such non-material needs as education and participation in management and decision-making;

(b) It should be integrated and self-sustaining: operational and regional integration should, as a matter of priority, use locally-available material and human resources in order to make for collective self reliance;

(c) It should be endogenous, that is to say, be based on an independent political process suited to the peculiar nature of each society and require structural changes at the political and socio-economic levels; and

(d) It should be ecologically sound to the extent that it both controls and protects the environment: in making technological choices, care should be taken to promote local capabilities and to improve traditional techniques at the same time that industrial techniques are adapted and new technologies created.

Most of the problems are specific to a region and the environment has a considerable influence over such specificity.

Conclusion

If the majority of the rural poor are to be able to participate in development, they should be organized into autonomous groupings or movements.

One of the remarkable consequences of this idea is that it allows for a plurality of solutions based on the extreme economic, social and cultural diversity of regions.

If economic and social problems were identified at the local level, development programmes and policies would, in turn, lend themselves to implementation at that same level.

II. The grass-roots in terms of traditional solidarity

Within the context of Africa's current development, the concept of the grass-roots takes many forms: village development associations with such off-shoots as village groups, women, youth and other groups, community self-help

initiatives, business fraternities, associations of nationals and other mutual assistance groups.

The common characteristic feature of these inventive and creative grass-roots organizations is that their solidarity has been forced or generated by the environment and seeks to help the society in which it evolves.

In order to describe the various types of traditional solidarity from a development viewpoint, three modes of analysis will be used to highlight some of the realities that such organizations experience internally. These will be:

(a) The analysis of needs and how they have been addressed;

(b) The analysis of functions and activities; and

(c) The analysis of structural forms and levels.

1. Analysis of needs and how they have been addressed

Traditional solidarity is characterized by collective reaction to individual needs expressed at various levels. Chief among them are:

(a) Subsistence needs for water, food and shelter;

(b) Security considerations;

(c) Profit motives;

(d) Psycho-social needs;

(e) Interaction and other needs.

2. Analysis of functions and activities

Traditional solidarity groups perform a number of function and activities, namely:

(a) Economic functions: savings and credit schemes (tontines); production and marketing activities; craft making; installation (building) of community facilities;

(b) Psycho-social functions: self-training and education by the group; strengthening of group cohesion through the settlement of conflicts and maintenance of discipline; coverage of such social risks as old age, illness and death;

(c) Cultural functions: educational, festive, sporting and theatrical actvities.

3. Forms and levels of solidarity structures

The structuring of traditional associations may fall into two categories:

(a) Service associations

These often develop spontaneously and are structured as and when events or needs arise. Examples are roof repairs and death. A volunteer or designated person may lead the group.

There are also periodic forms of association: a group of persons may meet and organize itself for the purpose of mutual assistance over a specific period of time. The leadership of the group is entrusted in such cases to the oldest or most influential.

More structured and lasting forms are the occasions when a committee is set up with a chairman, secretary and other officers.

(b) Financial associations

Here, ad hoc and spontaneous contributions are made to cope with an immediate need such as a death or fire outbreak. One person assumes the responsibility for collecting the funds.

Tontines can be structured and directed by a committee whose mandate may be renewed by members.

Several factors come into play when tontine associations are formed. Sex, background, affinity, neighbourhood, religion, occupation and age may be the criteria for membership.

4. Potential and limits of associations

Traditional associations have both potential and limitations.

(a) Potential

This lies in the ability of associations to promote the striking of a balance between the individual and society, harmony within the society and an advocacy which allows the association to meet with modern structures.

In economic and financial terms, the sums of money saved are better managed and therefore free from monopoly. This imparts dynamism to the association.

Similarly, the functions and activities of such associations have the potential of enabling the human and socio-cultural values of the society in which they operate to be preserved.

Therefore, associations are not only structure within the environment but also a way of structuring society itself.

(b) Limitations

Because of their small size, their more or less tribal nature and the illiteracy which restricts their prospects for development, such associations often do not last long.

In their functions, they have financial limitations which do not allow them to undertake sizeable investments. Their legal and technical limitations are reflected in the absence of statutes, in organizational, know-how and material deficiencies.

Because they are geographically circumscribed, as people living within a locality, they may have no interaction with others.

B. POPULAR PARTICIPATION AS AN APPROACH TO GRASS-ROOTS DEVELOPMENT

I. The approaches

Africa's experiments with the participation of its people in development have yielded poor results because there are no appropriate mechanisms for achieving effective integration. Such participation practices may be classified under four criteria based on a few basic dynamic relationships.

1. Co-operation under a pre-established programme, plan or project

Generally three phases can be noted in the place accorded to popular participation in the national policies pursued in Africa south of the Sahara.

In the years following independence, the need for popular participation was officially recognized and addressed in many rural and urban leadership programmes carried out in Senegal, the Niger and Madagascar and in the community development projects implemented in such English-speaking African countries as Ghana, Kenya and so on.

Around 1970, this approach was replaced in practice, especially in the rural areas, by projects which could be defined as a specific intervention of the State in the lives of farmers with a view to achieving such objectives over delimited time, space and using specific resources.

In this case, participation was like mobilization of people into a process designed as part of an institutional framework over which the farmers had no control.

Since the 1980s, such projects have been questioned mainly because of their costs and their limited ability to deliver.

(b) A community may be organized from the top downwards with the express aim of promoting the participation of its members. Village co-operatives or rural unions and groups are typical examples of the organizational forms imported into Africa. Curiously, these forms of organization initiated by State agencies were introduced into those branches of economic activity where cash crops like cotton, coffee and cocoa were produced. In this case, there is a convergence between the interest of the State (in promoting a foreign exchange earning commodity), the interest of the farmers and that of such aid agencies as the World Bank and the Caisse centrale de coopération économique.

For a quarter century after independence, the history of co-operatives has been marked by a series of failures and reforms which have often discouraged farmers.

In such situations of false co-operatives, it is not the appellation which counts but rather the organizational function which should be controlled by the members and contribute effectively to improving their living conditions.

(c) Community development

The English-speaking African countries, in particular, have kept organizations drawing on the tradition of community development. In this approach, many examples of successful participation can be found especially when the field of application is clearly defined in terms of water, health care, infrastructure and the like. This last form of participation does not necessarily take an institutional form. All it needs is self-help initiative.

(d) Responsibility

Particularly in recent years when people's organizations such as village development associations, ICA, ICB, IID and other co-operatives have spontaneously been created, the structures assuming responsibility for control of the environment and its future have been little considered.

Such organizations have not been created in any way by decision of the State but they often contributed to structuring the grass-root.

Their operations take the form of participation as promoted by NGOs and often involve, if only implicitly, the sharing of power as well as resources.

II. THE BASIS OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION

From their common memory, people draw inspiration for the future.

The fact is that the magnitude of the current crisis in Africa exceeds the capability of African Governments to cope within the limitations of their genius and the various programmes they have adopted. Africa is too much of a problem for any economic or ideological doctrine of whatever hue to deal with alone.

The numerous challenges that are emerging as the millennium comes to a close can be summarized by what I would term the single challenge of Africa's survival. This challenge calls for a basic needs strategy and requires all men of goodwill to promote a civilization of simplicity.

A civilization of simplicity creates, first and foremost, a simple society based on an efficient interaction of the creative energies of the broad masses and for that reason draws on the people's wisdom. It uses the collective memory in delving into the wellspring of people's knowledge and energy as a necessary means of creating and recreating the conditions for survival.

III. WHAT IS POPULAR PARTICIPATION?

(a) Popular participation consists of restoring the power of local people to take the initiative and the decisions in formulating and implementing activities and programmes concerning their own future. It consists of recognizing that the people (farmers, livestock raisers, urban dwellers and so on) are creators of change and full-fledged partners in development;

(b) Promoting popular participation therefore means instituting a partnership, a contractual relationship among the various agents of development, in particular between the people concerned and those intervening from the outside. Whether the programmes are initiated from outside or in support of previously existing local initiatives, those intervening from outside should start off where the needs and aspirations of the people begin and accept to negotiate on that basis.

If in many cases, such a partnership is initially held back by such factors as poor organization and improper formulation of request for assistance, the conditions for the partnership must be created;

(c) Popular participation is not only expressed at a local village or community level in the implementation of specific programmes but must also extend to the definition of development policies for larger areas (regional and national) which should be phased in as and when the grass-root people's organizations consolidate and federate themselves;

(d) Popular participation is a continuous and dynamic process which allows people to identify the economic and socio-cultural institutions that make for the grounding of their programmes and the constant renewal of action groups.

IV. OBSTACLES TO POPULAR PARTICIPATION

Two categories of obstacles can be identified: those concerning the relationship between people's organizations and agencies intervening from the outside (the State or NGOs); and those relating to producer organizations and the operating principles and rules imported and applied.

1. Obstacles relating to partnership

One of the major obstacles to popular participation is, without any doubt the unwillingness of outside agencies to demonstrate a genuine resolve in the practice of partnership. On the one hand, the projects and activities carried out in the field are formulated at the initiative of an outside body acting in an administrative capacity and issuing directives without really consulting the beneficiaries. On the other hand, through their project, the outside agencies resort to the dynamics of social and group psychology with a view to correcting the internal relation-ships of an organization without modifying its structure.

Because there are so many development agencies each dealing with problems in each sector, people can only get more and more confused because they do not have the training necessary to understand how all those activities which are being proposed willy nilly to them tie into one another. The people give the

impression of being overwhelmed by the publicity that development agents make about their project.

The tendency is to set up village groups, associations and committees each time a new operation commences.

This has the double inconvenience of multiplying, at times needlessly, people's organizations and marginalizing existing forms of organization with the result, in cases, of creating social tension. Certain circumstances also constitute obstacles to popular participation because the concept is tied up with demographic practice and is hardly compatible with authoritarian regimes or the bureaucratic mentality of civil servants.

2. Obstacles relating to imported ideas

When the four first articles considered by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) as formal criteria for classification as a co-operative are applied to producers' organizations in a completely different cultural environment, serious obstacles to popular participation arise. The four first principles are as follows:

(a) Freedom of membership: the principle of free individual membership is significant in a society actually composed of autonomous individuals who can take decisions independently of the group to which they belong (the extended family or the community).

Freedom of membership is reflected in the payment of social dues in monetary form. When this is fixed by authority from outside, the result is an increase of domestic inequalities. This principle should be replaced with village community decisions taken after serious consultation to decide who shall be members of the group or co operative and how such membership may be acquired.

For organizations based on existing village structures, the fact of being a villager ipso facto makes one a member of the association and, in that capacity, confers the right of access, on the same footing as any other villager, to all the services provided by the association in terms of production inputs, credit and the like.

(b) One man one vote: it is not this basic principle which is being questioned but the way it is aped in African societies and the serious cultural misunderstandings it creates. Such a principle is so far removed from the social logic of African society that it becomes not only inadmissible but also incomprehensible. The local communities concerned are structured on a system of values which places individuals in a hierarchy and determines their position on the social ladder using such criteria as age, sex and caste.

3. Returns commensurate with operations

By making it a co-operative obligation, right from the outset, that surpluses should be distributed among individual members, the confidence of members is being elicited to the detriment of community welfare. The spontaneous reactions of farmers in such cases is to use such funds for community purposes.

4. Capital-limited interest

When free individual membership is reflected in the payment of social dues, the practical outcome, as was demonstrated earlier, is an increase in domestic inequalities.

This paradox in setting up a 'share company' under the label of a co-operative occurs when the enterprise carries out the collection and lending operations to its sole benefit.

The principle of limiting interest is also side-tracked and understood to be equally a limitation of the interests accruing to the co-operative on the loans granted to members.

To conclude, specific reference to ICA principles should be abandoned in favour of the spirit of Rochdale. Since the final objective of society is to have the powers of production, distribution, education and self-governance, or to be a self-supporting community, it should have the courage to differ from imported models which are based on unsuitable laws.

This also means that instead of beginning with legislation and making farmers toe the line, they should be consulted first in discussing the specific problems they face and be helped to organize themselves. Following that, the provisional structures will operate to rules of procedure that can be revised every year. Only after some years will the synthesis of such rules of procedure give rise to statute on the basis of which suitable legislation can be enacted to strengthen what can be seen to be traditional democracy.

C. RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF NGOs AND PEOPLES' ORGANIZATIONS

Today, NGOs are considered as dynamic auxiliaries in the system of development co-operation.

They are mainly associations of citizens who assign themselves a relatively specific social objective not coming under public authority and which, even if they pursue economic objectives, do happen to be a private enterprise in the usual meaning of the term. Obviously, NGOs which participate in development are, at the same time, pursuing economic objectives but in contrast to private enterprises which are production and marketing organizations seeking exclusively to enrich their individual members, NGOs essentially aim at securing the welfare of a community even though the members may become rich in the process.

As defined, Africa is rich in NGOs. Mention was made of village development associations, co-operatives, tontines and village groups at the local level. At the regional or national level can be found organizations created by the churches. Also to be found are national branches of African regional or international NGOs.

The common characteristics of these NGOs are: ideological independence; the concern to be independent of the public authorities of their countries of

origin or host countries; financial independence; flexibility in operation; a rather global approach; a strategy of working closely with the grass-roots.

I. VILLAGE ASSOCIATIONS AS CONSTRUCTS FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The question which might need to be asked is whether (through popular participation) these grass-roots organizations can take up the major challenges which Africa has to face at the close of this century. The three main challenges are the following: the meeting of essential needs; the struggle to control the degradation of eco-systems; and the community management of land.

1. Associations and the meeting of essential needs

As COOPEC, tontines and other associations have found, the existence of autonomous financial resources in the villages radically changes the relationship of villagers with external aid donors.

From the status of beggars, villagers are becoming solvent clients who can pay in full or in part for the services they need.

2. Associations and the struggle to check environmental degradation

Without any dispute, this is the most tragic issue facing sub-Saharan Africa today. And yet nothing but collective solutions can be found to this problem to the extent that whole drainage basins have to be developed and vast spaces planted with trees. Here again, village associations have a decisive role to play in mobilizing both the labour and the capital required.

3. Associations and instruments of land administration

The cumulative economic inequalities resulting in an increasingly higher imbalance in land distribution will later bring about private allocation and land concentration systems which will give those left out a mere choice between receiving salaries or moving away.

It is here that village associations could assume the new and most vital role of community land management. This would entail a constantly renewed process of adjustment between cultivable land areas, the number of consumers and the number of farm hands.

This would require the surveying and mapping not of individual farms but of all village lands.

The new communal dynamism created by the associations should be put to profitable use by undertaking serious discussions in villages on land sharing and on long-term family land use.

II. NGOS AND INTERDEPENDENCE

As already mentioned, Africa abounds in NGOs, which variously bring together junior or senior citizens and deal with micro and macro economic issues.

Some are engaged in training or in production, others are religious and others secular.

Some observations made about NGOs and sometimes by NGOs themselves are that they often play the role of the people's mouthpiece; it is believed that they are not easily taken as partners by the people and that they are underestimated by Government organizations. Funding NGOs impose their principles and conditions. It is time these practices were changed.

NGOs interact with a number of agents who may be perceived as problematic or conflictual factors in the operating environment which is decided into four categories, namely:

(a) Groups of internal endogenous agents such as individual farmers and farmers associations;

(b) Groups of external endogenous agents such as NGOs and related bodies such as churches;

(c) Groups of internal agents such as Government organizations (NGOs) in working relationship with farmers organizations and NGOs; and

(d) A group of exogenous external agents made up of funding GOs or NGOs.

1. Towards contractual planning

As development associations, NGOs adopt development strategies. There is a saying that one can not embark on a project without first planning it, and a plan can not be considered well executed until all the parts of the project have been completed.

In other words, to integrate there must first be planning and to plan there must first be integration. This dilemma is the origin of contractual planning, that is the imposition of project planning under a system of laws or obligations and the freedom of association represented in village development associations village groupings, ICD and others.

The local or regional NGOs plan areas of co-operation with Government organizations, areas such as rural development and health. When project agreement has been concluded with a Governmental organization of the economic North the package is brought back to the grassroots level.

Efforts at the grassroots and highest levels (whether at the level of Southern GOs or NGOs or Northern GOs or NGOs) have to be integrated to form a dynamic force.

The NGOs should use all the various facets of contractual planning to catalyse popular participation in the numerous aspects of integrated development. Somehow, there question arises as to who should sign a contract with whom or what should be integrated into what with regard to:

(a) Entrepreneurial development;

(b) local development;

(c) Organizational development;

(d) North-South, or even South-South development;

(e) Technological development;

(f) Educational development; and

(g) Intergenerational development.

2. NGO efforts in respect of self-organizing groups

The "Six S" groups of Yatenga in Burkina Faso created the axiom of "development without destruction". Given the principles summarized in this axiom, what farmers are, experience, know, do and want should inform the attitudes to be developed towards a group that is mobilized and constitutes the traditional target of NGO actions, involving:

(a) Respect for the local group dynamics that facilitate study of the environment and research development;

(b) Promotion of self-help given the fact that no action taken to help out the beneficiary can be really beneficial to him since the benefit is thus derived from the action itself and not necessarily from its result;

(c) Enablement of the group to manage its own projects;

(d) Acceptance of the group's development methods and its projects;

(e) Empowerment rather than corruption of the local group with assistance and aid;

(f) Journeying of local groups in their quest to appropriate the project and achieve autonomy by helping them to create efficient technical services that address their management, organizational and self-evaluation needs;

(g) Walking the group through its reflections on the purpose of its action.

Our analysis is on the attitude to be adopted by the NGOs in order to win the confidence of their contractual partners. The following three observations will suffice.

(a) The Governmental organizations will take NGOs seriously:

(i) if they talk less and act more, in other words, NGO ideologies (and sometimes rhetoric) tend to irritate Governments when those words are not translated into concrete and organized action;

(ii) If they succeed in presenting a specific regional plan of their actions, instead of spreading their operations thin and failing to connect them coherently;

(iii) If they operate in synergy by making a special effort to pool their resources through an optimal combination of factors.

(b) The international NGOs will take national NGOs seriously:

(i) If they demonstrate a strong resolve in stimulating action, initiative and new ideas and if they refuse to be mere endurers of the passing fancy of financial organizations;

(ii) If their zeal is prompted by a real desire for organizational and financial autonomy, even if such a desire can only be realized in the medium and long-term; whatever the case, it has been programmed.

(c) NGOs absolutely need to use a regulatory instrument to fortify existing systems and provide them with a launching pad. This is necessary for the following reasons:

(i) Regional planning: One can no longer be restricted in time and space but must move on to the pursuit of collective strategies within the context of regional planning.

(ii) Economies of scale: The financial autonomy that all the NGOs are advocating can be achieved only with the institution of such services as would help to avoid duplication or triplication of similar services.

(iii) Reaching beyond the local level: As earlier mentioned, the age of restriction by time and space has passed. What is needed now is regionalization, that is, planning while taking the region into account. For instance, how can agricultural products be marketed without setting up regional unions and regional marketing centres. If this is not implemented at the NGO level, then it would be imposed by the Government organizations. Economics must reach beyond the local level, otherwise the local economy loses.

(d) Horizontal co-operation: NGOs usually possess extraordinary potentialities in their various fields of activity, but these potentialities are limited by the mere fact that each NGO is specialized. Nevertheless, the requests made and the services offered are diverse, hence the demand for linking up with other NGOs and encouraging horizontal combined action, which will have a convergent effect on and result in an optimal utilization of each NGO's resources. There is one condition however and that is, an open-door policy, foresight, accessibility and information.

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PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT: SOME PERSPECTIVES FROM GRASS-ROOTS EXPERIENCES

by
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INTRODUCTION 1

In recent years, especially since the early 1970s, there has been an increasing interest in participatory approaches to development. This interest is manifested both at the national and international levels and appears to be shared by individuals and institutions of widely divergent ideologies and backgrounds. At the international level, most multilateral and bilateral agencies have recognized the importance of participation both as a means and as an objective of development. Likewise, national plans in many countries pay a great deal of attention to the need for a participatory pattern of development. However, as tends to happen in situations of this sort, this growing consensus owes much to certain ambiguities in the concept of participation. Different authors and organizations give different interpretations to this concept. Often these differences are a reflection of differences over the concept of development itself.

The notion of participation may be examined from different levels and perspectives. One distinction relates to participation in the public domain, work place and at home. The first aspect refers to all matters discussed and decided in public institutions–local organizations, national governments, parliaments, parties, etc. The second concerns factories, offices, plantations, farms and other work places. The third dimension refers to family relations and work at home. The latter is largely neglected in most discussions on participation. Yet, in relation to the time spent in different places, "home democracy" is at least as important as "work democracy" and is a crucial determinant of the welfare of some members of the family, especially the women and children.

A different but slightly overlapping distinction concerns participation at local, national and international levels. Although there has been a good deal of discussion of participation promotion at the local and national levels, much less attention has been given to the implications of a participatory approach at the global level. 2/ In view of the linkages and interrelationships between developments at these different levels, a satisfactory analysis of participation should be based on a recognition of interdependence among the different levels of aggregation. This is, however, a complex and daunting undertaking. This article has a more limited and modest purpose, namely to shed some light on the participatory approach to development through a study of selected grass-roots initiatives in a few Asian and African countries. This is done in the belief that these experiences yield fresh and exciting perspectives on the meaning and processes of development and contain within them elements of a self-reliant, egalitarian and participatory approach to development. They, therefore, offer a rich field to draw lessons from with a view to strengthening the quality of development efforts in rich and poor countries alike.

In the light of the preceding remarks, the paper begins with a discussion of some alternative concepts of development and participation. This is followed by a brief description of nine grass-roots initiatives whose experiences are used subsequently to illustrate some aspects of participatory approaches to development. The paper then examines the themes of participatory processes and institutional framework, and of self-reliance and the role of outside assistance. There is then an analysis of these initiatives as economic enterprises, agencies of social reform and schools for democracy. The

concluding section focuses on their strengths and limitations as alternative development models. The gender issues are discussed in various sections of the paper.

A. Alternative concepts of development and participation

The notion of development is an ambiguous one and is subject to different interpretations. 3/ We may distinguish here three interpretations. First, development is often treated synonymously with economic growth and is thus interpreted to mean increases in labour productivity, declining share of agriculture in total output, technological progress, and industrialization with the consequent shift of population to urban areas. While these structural changes are generally associated with economic growth, equating them with development shifts the focus to economic aggregates and away from living standards and human dimensions.

The second interpretation of development seeks to remedy this deficiency by concentrating on such indices of living standards as poverty, income distribution, nutrition, infant mortality, life expectancy, literacy, education, access to employment, housing, water supply and similar amenities. This way of looking at development brings it closer to the common-sense view and endows it with greater human reality. Nevertheless, the emphasis continues to be on economic and social indicators and individual human beings and social groups tend to be off-stage passively supplied with goods, services and materials.

In contrast, the third view of development puts the spotlight on human potentials and capabilities in the context of relations with other social groups. According to this view, development is seen in such terms as greater understanding of social, economic and political processes, enhanced competence to analyse and solve problems of day-to-day living, expansion of manual skills and greater control over economic resources, restoration of human dignity and self-respect, and interaction with other social groups on a basis of mutual respect and equality. This notion of development does not neglect material deprivation and poverty but the focus shifts to realization of human potential expressed in such terms as human dignity, self-respect, social emancipation, and enhancement of moral, intellectual and technical capabilities. 4/

The three ways of looking at development are not, of course, mutually exclusive. Indeed, the optimal pattern of development should embody elements of all three: the growth of human capabilities and potentials must be accompanied by a progressive reduction of material deprivation and social inequalities which, in turn, should flow from structural change and modernization of the economy. But in practice, these aspects of development seldom evolve in a harmonious relationship and typically, emphasis on one or the other would have different implications for organization of economic activities, patterns of investment and design of programmes and projects.

As with development, the concept of participation is also riddled with ambiguities. Once again, it may be useful to distinguish between three different interpretations. One common usage of the term refers to "mobilization" of people to undertake social and economic development projects. Typically the projects are conceived and designed from above and the people are "mobilized" to implement them. Their participation thus consists in their contribution of labour and materials, either free or paid for by the authorities. The projects which generally tend to be of an infrastructural nature are

meant to benefit the rural poor. But in many cases the benefit may accrue mainly in the form of employment generated during the construction phase. The distribu-tion of the benefits from the assets and facilities created would depend on a variety of factors such as the patterns of ownership of productive resources, the distribution of political power among social groups and the nature of the project. At their best, such projects may result in a widespread diffusion of benefits both in the construction and the subsequent phase. At worst, "participation" may result in free provision of labour and materials by the poor to create facilities which are of benefit primarily to the affluent groups.

The second interpretation equates participation with decentralization in governmental machinery or in related organizations. Resources and decision-making powers may be transferred to lower level organs such as local officials, elected bodies at the village or county level, or local project committees. 5/ While this may make possible local-level decisions on the choice, design and implementation of development activities, there is no presumption that this need imply any meaningful participation by the rural or urban masses. Indeed, the distribution of political and economic power at local levels in many countries is such that decentralization may well result in allocation of resources and choice of development activities which are less beneficial to the poor than when such decisions are taken at the central level.

The third view of participation regards it as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded (Gran, 1983; Oakley, 1987; Oakley and Marsden, 1984). This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation is interpreted to imply a strengthening of the power of the deprived masses. Its three main elements have been defined as "the sharing of power and of scarce resources, deliberate efforts by social groups to control their own destinies and improve their living conditions, and opening up of opportunities from below" (Dillon and Steifel, 1987). Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of organizations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant (Advisory Committee on Rural Development, 1979; International Labour Organisation, 1976).

One facet of empowerment is thus pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and countervailing power. Another is the enhancement of manual and technical skills, planning and managerial competence and analytical and reflective abilities of the people. It is at this point that the concept of participation as empowerment comes close to the notion of development as fulfilment of human potentials and capabilities. This view of participation and development may best be illustrated through the experience of some grass-roots initiatives, to which we now turn.

B. Some grass-roots participatory initiatives

In recent years, there has been a huge expansion of small-scale development projects focusing on the rural and the urban poor and involving some sort of group action (Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development, 1981; Economic Commission for Latin America, 1973; Food and Agriculture Organization, 1979; Hirschman, 1984; United Nations, 1981; Wasserstrom, 1985; World Health Organization, 1982). These projects show a great deal of variation with respect to activities, organizational framework, financing arrangements, the sponsoring agencies, the role of outside assistance and the nature and extent of popular participation. They range from

outstanding to disastrous judged by the criterion of participation as empowerment of the people. In this section we give a brief description of nine grass-roots experiences which, while displaying a great deal of diversity in respect of some aspects mentioned above, nevertheless share some characteristics as participatory initiatives. The nine initiatives considered here are the Grameen Bank (GB), the Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP), the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA), the Working Women's Forum (WWF), Sarilakas, Participatory Institute for Development Alternatives (PIDA), Se servir de la saison sèche en savane et au Sahel (Six-S), the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), and Action pour le developpement rural integre (ADRI).

Although they have several points in common, it is convenient to group them into four categories in accordance with their central characteristics. The first category, comprising GB and SFDP, illustrates innovative programmes to extend credit to the rural poor. SEWA and WWF represent pioneering efforts to organize poor women working in urban slums as vendors, home-based workers and casual labourers into trade-union type associations. The third category, illustrated by Sarilakas and PIDA, comprises initiatives to promote peasant groups and rural workers' organizations to struggle for their rights and to undertake collective initiatives to appropriate a larger share of the surplus generated by their economic activities. The fourth category, comprising Six-S, ORAP and ADRI, represents efforts to promote social and economic development through mobilization and pooling of labour and other resources, drawing inspiration from traditional self-help and mutual aid groups.

1. Promoting participation through credit programmes

The Grameen Bank was started in 1976 by a professor of economics at Chittagong University as an experiment to provide credit to poor landless men and women in rural areas (Fuglesang and Chandler, 1986; Ghai, 1984; Hossain, 1984; Khan, 1982; Yunus, 1982). Initially supported by funds from some commercial and nationalized banks, it became an independent bank in 1983. As of now, the Government has 25 per cent of the initial paid-up share of the capital with the remaining 75 per cent being held by borrowers of the bank. The GB has received funds from a number of donor agencies including IFAD, the Asian Development Bank and the Ford Foundation. The membership is restricted to the poor defined by a net worth criterion.

Members organize themselves into groups of five persons and 10 such groups constitute a circle. The loans which are quite modest in size are given for a one-year period and the principal is repaid in weekly instalments over this period. The banking operations take place in weekly meetings held in the locality of the groups. The loans are granted for a wide range of economic activities such as trading, transport, processing, handicraft, cattle raising and simple manufacturing. There are separate groups for men and women with the latter now accounting for two thirds of the total. The bank has experienced a rapid expansion in its activities with the number of members increasing from less than 15,000 in 1980 to nearly 250,000 in 1988. The members have established a variety of social programmes such as family planning, schools, nutrition, sports and music, and have sought to promote social reforms.

The SFDP in Nepal is also a credit programme for the rural poor but, unlike the GB, it extends loans to small and marginal farmers (Agricultural Projects Services Centre, 1979; Ghai, 1984; Ghai, Lohani and Rahman, 1984; Mosley and Prasad Dahal, 1987; Rokaya,

1983). It evolved from a pilot project launched in 1975 by the Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal (ADB/N) with financial and technical support from FAO/UNDP. The basic objectives of the project were to increase the incomes and standard of living of the rural poor, promote participation and self-reliance, and adapt local delivery mechanisms of government agencies to the needs of the rural poor. The approach adopted was to encourage the rural poor to organize themselves in small groups with the assistance of a group organizer to receive credit for individual and joint activities. The credit was provided on a group guarantee basis without any collateral.

The membership has expanded from around 440 in 1976 to around 25,000 in 1984 and perhaps 50,000 in 1988. It has attracted funds from a number of bilateral and multilateral sources. The programme comprises a wide range of economic, social and community activities which are supported by an expanding training component. Economic activities include cultivation, livestock, horticulture, irrigation, cottage and rural industry and marketing. Social activities comprise health, education, family planning, maternal welfare and child care and sanitation. Community projects comprise construction of roads, bridges, schools, meeting halls, water facilities, irrigation, biogas and social forestry. The bulk of economic activities are undertaken of an individual basis with, however, growing importance of group ownership and management in cottage industry, orchards and irrigation.

2. Organizing poor self-employed women in urban slums

SEWA represents a pioneering effort to organize self-employed poor women in urban slums in Gujerat, India, into a trade union-type organization (Self-employed Women's Association, 1984). Until they formed a trade union in 1972, self-employed women were not recognized as workers by legislation or by society. Thus their struggle related as much to their desire for recognition as legitimate workers as to improvements in income and working conditions. The initiative in forming SEWA was taken by an experienced woman trade unionist who previously worked with the long-established Textile Labour Association. Its membership is drawn from three categories of women workers: petty vendors and hawkers, home-based producers, and providers of casual labour and services. Started primarily as a movement for poor urban women, it has now also spread to cover women agricultural labourers and home-based workers in rural areas.

As a trade union for self-employed women, it has worked to secure higher wages for casual workers, for those on contract work such as home-based workers and for suppliers of services such as cleaning and laundering, and a gradual extension to such workers of protection and benefits provided by labour legislation to organized workers in modern enterprises. It has also instituted a credit scheme for vendors, hawkers and home-based workers to finance working capital and purchase of raw materials and tools. Credit was originally arranged through nationalized commercial banks but soon the women decided to form their own savings and credit co-operative. The co-operative has expanded rapidly in terms of shareholders, deposits and loans.

Further benefits have accrued to vendors, craftswomen and homebased workers through the formation of producers' co-operatives for vegetable and fruit sellers, bamboo workers, hand block printers, spinning-wheel and handloom operators and dairy workers.

The economic capacity of the members has also been enhanced by the provision of training courses in a wide range of skills such as bamboo work, block printing, plumbing, carpentry, radio repairs, simple accounting and management. Finally SEWA has sought to solve some of the urgent social problems of their members through a maternal protection scheme, widowhood benefits, child care and training of midwives.

The Working Women's Forum was started in 1978 at the initiative of a woman activist with considerable previous experience in social and political work. It operates in the southern Indian States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (Arunachalam, 1983; Azad, 1985; Chambers, 1985; Chen, 1982). Its membership of nearly 50,000 is drawn largely from poor urban women but there is also increasing representation from rural areas. It covers similar occupational groups as SEWA such s street hawkers, craft producers, home-based workers, and fisherwomen and dairy workers in rural areas. It arranges loans for members from the commercial banks and increasingly from the Working Women's Co-operative Society - the savings and credit scheme set up by the members themselves. The WWF has also initiated a wide range of training schemes. It has organized extensive family planning and public health programmes, group insurance schemes, night schools for working children, campaigns against caste prejudice and discrimination, petty harassment and bureaucratic abuse suffered by its members, and educational session of workers' rights and minimum wages.

3. Promoting peasant groups and organizations of rural workers

Sarilakas in the Philippines evolved out of an attempt by the ... ...kers' Office, Ministry of Labour, to organize the unorganized rural workers. The initial attempts to promote rural workers' organizations suffered a series of setbacks due to inadequate preparation, faulty approach and excessive economic expectations engendered by the "facilitators" (Rahman, 1983). With assistance from the ILO and exposure of the organizers to participatory initiatives in Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh, the project adopted a different approach with emphasis on group discussions and analysis of their socio-economic situation, reflection on the sources of their impoverishment and identification of feasible initiatives in a self-reliant framework. The new approach proved more successful in establishing durable participatory organi. .tions in several villages resulting in a series of different initiatives such as the institution of collective savings schemes for purchase of inputs by marginal farmers, joint ownership and operation of agricultural machinery and rice mills, rehabilitation of irrigation facilities, enforcement of legislation on change from sharecropping tenancy to fixed-rent liability, protection of the fishing rights of small fishermen, land rights of sugarcane growers, etc.

In 1982, the project was taken over by a non-governmental organization - PROCESS. Subsequent activities have included community communications, legal assistance to the poor and education and training. The organization is now working in 9 provinces, 49 municipalities and around 260 villages.

PIDA in Sri Lanka was established in 1980 as a non-governmental organization for the promotion of grass-roots participatory groups. It is an action research collective with a membership of 15 or so animators working in 40 villages in various rural locations (Tilakaratna, 1985). It grew out of the UNDP-sponsored Rural Action Research and Training Project initiated in 1978. Its main objective is to promote participatory and self-reliant organizations of the rural poor which in turn can become the main vehicle

of their economic and social advance. The key role in this process is played by animators who encourage the villagers with similar background to come together for informal discussion of their socio-economic situation, the problems they face and the steps they might take to ameliorate their living standards and working conditions. After initiating the process of group discussion and reflection, the animator attempts progressively to reduce his or her role leaving it to the villagers themselves to conduct their inquiries, form groups and take initiatives to strengthen their economic position.

The initiatives can take a variety of forms. Some groups focused their attention on possible savings from purchases of consumer goods in village stores. They expanded their activities to procure and distribute a whole range of basic consumer goods and start thrift and credit societies, thus evolving co-operatives of the rural poor. The groups, which started from the production front, cut down their cultivation costs through a series of collective efforts, used their spare time to cultivate a common plot of land as a means of increasing their collective fund, initiated actions to develop irrigation facilities and diversify crop patterns, established links with banks and obtained bank credit by demonstrating their credit-worthiness, thus eliminating their dependence on usurer credit, and bargained for improved access to public services.

Some groups began their activities in produce marketing. They devised collective marketing schemes, explored and discovered new market outlets, delinked from village traders and intermediaries and retrieved the surpluses hitherto extracted by them, stored a part of the crop to take advantage of better prices and increased the value of the produce by processing. In the case of wage labourers, attempts were made to check leakages from their income streams by forming informal co-operatives for consumer, credit and thrift activities, and to obtain access to land or other productive assets, thus switching over from the sale of labour to farming either on a part-time or full-time basis.

4. Mobilizing resources through self-help and co-operative efforts

Six-S was started in 1974 in Burkina Faso at the initiative of a local agronomist working with some foreign volunteers. The original motive was to take advantage of the long dry period from October to May to undertake a series of self-help social and economic activities to improve the living standards of the rural people (Egger, 1987a; Rahman, 1988; Sawadogo and Ouedraogo, 1987). The practice until then had been for the young people to migrate to urban areas and to neighbouring countries in search of employment. One feature of this initiative was reliance on traditional Naam groups of mutual help and co-operation to promote a large scale, self-help movement with numbers running into 200,000 and extension into their Sahelian countries such as Mali, Mauritania and Senegal.

The groups undertake a variety of income-generating, community and social activities. The first set includes vegetable gardening, stock farming, handicraft, millet mills, cereal banks, and production and sale of horse carts. Communal activities comprise construction of water dams and dikes, anti-erosion works, wells, afforestation, etc., while social projects include rural pharmacies, primary health care, schools, theatres, etc. Six-S provides credit to partially support such projects. Activities of communal benefit are subsidized through limited cash remuneration and food for work and free supply of the needed equipment. In turn, Six-S gets funds from member groups'

contributions and external donors. All Six-S groups have a savings fund built with member subscriptions and receipts from income-generating activities.

There has been a rapid multiplication of groups in the region. The established groups assist new ones in a variety of ways. Farmer-technicians are employed by Six-S during the slack season to advise the groups and assist their activities. When some members of Six-S groups carry out an innovation or master a technique, they form a mobile school to transmit it to other groups. Thus new ideas and innovations spread rapidly throughout the Six-S movement.

ORAP was started in 1981 by a group of concerned people in Matabeleland in Zimbabwe to initiate a new approach to their development problems. It sees itself essentially as a support organization for self-reliant development in rural areas. Its first priority is the encouragement and support of autonomous organizations amongst rural people and their ability to analyse their own situation. (Chavunduka and others, 1985; Nyoni, 1986). As with Six-S, it also relied on traditional groups and practices of mutual help and co-operation. The basic units are village groups which federate into "umbrellas" and higher up to associations and finally to the Advisory Board of ORAP.

After a period of deliberation and analysis, the groups undertake a variety of economic and social activities, combining their skills and labour with material and financial assistance from external donors through ORAP. The activities comprise carpentry, netwire making, sewing, building, basketry, wood carving, livestock grazing, vegetable gardening, poultry-keeping, baking and grinding mills.

Considerable emphasis is put on training and development education activities. The prolonged drought in the region led ORAP to develop a food relief programme and subsequently to give priority to food production with stress on recourse to traditional seeds and fertilizers, diversity of food produced, improved food storage and cereal banks in the villages and improved water storage and local irrigation schemes. Recently new emphasis has been put on organizing activities at the family units - a collective of 5 to 10 families - to meet their immediate needs such as wells for drinking water, sanitary latrines, improved baths, improved kitchens, as well as cultivation, food production, harvesting and thrashing corn.

Another recent innovation has been the construction on a self-help basis of development centres. These are multipurpose centres for meetings, workshops, organization of training courses in various technical fields, such as bakery, building, blacksmithing and marketing.

ADRI is an organization of peasant groups in Rwanda. It owes its origin to an initiative taken in 1979 by a local agronomist to undertake "animation" work with peasant women in the Kabaye district in 1979 (Action pour le developpement rural intégré, 1987; Egger, 1987b). As in Six-S and ORAP, the basis of organization was traditional groups of mutual help. Some other groups sprung up in the area leading to the formation of an inter-group organization. Impuzamirvango Tuzamuka Twese (ITT). Activities undertaken by the group include collective cultivation of cash crops, social forestry, grain storage, consumer stores, livestock rearing, furniture making, brick making, beer brewing and grain mills.

Dissatisfaction with the Banque populaire led the peasant groups to form their own savings and credit society called Caisse de Solidarite (Solidarity Bank). This society plays a particularly important role in the management of external funds for group activities. All the groups assume responsibility for these funds which serve both as a guarantee to donors and to generate collective interest in the repayment of funds by each group. Several groups have evolved into multipurpose co-operatives covering farming, marketing, artisan production and collective savings schemes. In one area, several groups have come together to form a fund with contributions from peasants particularly at harvest time, in cash or kind. The fund serves as a social security scheme for members covering death, fire, natural disasters, accident, sickness and finance of secondary education.

ADRI was formed to stimulate the expansion of such peasant groups to all parts of the country. It is a development NGO which assists peasant groups and associations through animation work, and exchange visits, promotion of a wider federation of associations and provision of direct support to base groups on funding and implementing collective social and economic projects.

C. Participatory processes and institutional framework

1. Contrasting conventional projects and participatory initiatives

It is no caricature to say that a conventional development project is conceived and designed from outside by national and international experts together with the paraphenalia of prefeasibility and feasibility studies, appraisal reports, specification of inputs and outputs, calculation of internal rates of return and sophisticated cost-benefit analysis. The people for whom all this is supposed to be done exist only in the abstract as numbers whose output and productivity are to be enhanced and whose "needs" are to be satisfied. Their participation in the preparatory phase, if they are lucky, may at best consist of some hastily organized meetings with the "experts" and bureaucrats where they are "briefed" about the objectives and activities of the planned projects. In the implementation phase they are expected to carry out their pre-assigned roles.

Participatory development is radically different in approach, methodology and operation. As implied earlier, its central concern is with the development of the moral, intellectual, technical and manual capabilities of individuals. A development project is, therefore, regarded as a process for the expansion of these capabilities. This implies that the initiative in establishing the activities must be taken by the people themselves who should also be firmly in charge of their implementation and evolution. this in turn calls for an entirely different methodology in initiating and sustaining development activities.

Social activists and leaders of grass-roots initiatives worldwide are working with many different approaches and methodologies for participation promotion. There is no single blueprint. Indeed, such a concept would be contradictory to the very spirit of participatory development whose central purpose is the awakening of people's dormant energies and unleashing of their creative powers. The grass-roots experiences described in the preceding section likewise reveal diversity of approaches to participation promotion. It may be useful to discuss separately two dimensions of this theme, namely methodologies and institutional framework for participation promotion.

2. Methodologies for participation promotion

Whatever their differences, the nine experiences considered here have one aspect in common: the initiation of development activities is preceded by a preparatory phase involving interaction with and among the people concerned. The purpose, duration and intensity of this interaction have tended to vary from one initiative to another. At one extreme, the interaction phase may consist only of understanding and acceptance of the basic objectives and operation of the project by the people before their enrolment as members. At the other extreme, this phase extending over long periods may involve intensive discussions and dialogue, analysis and reflection and conduct of field work and social inquiry, thus using the methodology of participation promotion associated with "conscientization" and "participatory action research". 6/ Depending on its scope and intensity, the preparatory phase may serve to instil discipline, build confidence, "indoctrinate" or socialize members to the underlying philosophy and objectives of the initiative, raise consciousness, develop critical and analytical abilities, and promote group solidarity and democratic practices. Furthermore, these processes of participation promotion are not considered once-for-all events preceding the initiation of development activities, but an integral part of the style of work within the association.

The initial phase in the establishment of peasant groups in Rwanda consists of animation and conscientization (Action pour le développement rural intégré, 1987). It is only after this phase that the peasants decide to form associations. The process also generates the array of activities to be undertaken by the group. Likewise the Six-S puts a great deal of emphasis on animation work and group meetings. The emerging pattern of activities is seen as a reflection of people's situation, knowledge, experiences, capacities and wishes. 7/ The WWF relies on spearhead teams and group organizers to initiate interaction with the potential members.

In ORAP, any material development work must be preceded and/or accompanied by continuous discussion and analysis of the reasons for undertaking a development activity. In principle, all groups must go through a discussion process to determine what their problems are, where they come from and how they can solve them. This approach is summarized graphically in the words of a member of a local group: "Before coming to ORAP, I didn't know how development started. Now I know that before development, there must be thoughts in mind." (Chavunduka and others, 1984).

SFDP and GB are first and foremost credit programmes. Before any activities are initiated, the group organizers in the former and bank workers in the latter undertake a socio-economic survey of the villages concerned. The "target" groups are then encouraged to come together for discussions among themselves and with the development workers. Out of this process emerge the groups which are the basic units around which the credit programme is organized. In GB, for example, the basic unit consists of a group of five landless persons. Before receiving loans, the groups go through an intensive "instruction" of one to two weeks on the philosophy, rules and procedures of the bank. The group members have to pass a "test" before they are granted recognition. During this "test" the members must satisfy the bank staff of their integrity and seriousness, understanding of the principles and procedures of the GB and ability to write their signatures.

The methodology of "conscientization" and "applied action research" is perhaps applied most systematically in the activities organized by PIDA. A brief illustration of its work in a village may convey the flavour of PIDA's approach to participation promotion (Tilakaratna, 1984). In 1978, a four-member team of development workers (DWs) visited a village to explore the possibility of initiating a grass-roots participatory development process. The first step was to make a preliminary study of socio-economic conditions in the village. The workers visited all households and initiated discussions with the people individually as well as in small informal groups on the problems at village level. The main poverty group was identified as betel producers. The DWs continued discussions about the source of their poverty. Soon, however, they reached the stage where further progress called for more information on production and marketing of betels than they possessed. Two village groups volunteered to undertake the investigations and collect information on the working of the betel industry - a women's group to examine production and a youth to explore the marketing aspects.

This investigation enabled the peasants to see for the first time the reality of betel farming, in particular how an impoverishment process had been created by the loss of a sizeable economic surplus at the marketing stage to the village traders who in turn sold betel leaves to state exporting firms. A group of betel producers then met to explore alternative marketing possibilities. An Action Committee formed by the group spent two months visiting various traders in the vicinity and exporting firms. After a series of setbacks and negative responses, the Committee found one exporting firm which was prepared to buy directly from them provided the sales were channelled through the registered village co-operative. This immediately resulted in a doubling of the prices received by peasants for their betel leaves and greater price stability. The group grew in number and the incomes of the members expanded threefold due to better prices and higher production. Subsequently they formed their own multipurpose co-operative.

The underlying approach of participatory development has been described in these words by PIDA's co-ordinator:

> "The central element of a participatory process was identified as conscientization which was seen as a process of liberating the creative initiatives of the people through a systematic process of investigation, reflection and analysis, undertaken by the people themselves. People begin to understand the social reality through a process of self-inquiry and analysis, and through such understanding, perceive self-possibilities for changing that reality ... Conscientization leads to self-organization by the people as a means of undertaking collective initiatives. Each action will be followed by reflection and analysis generating a process of praxis as a regular ongoing practice. These interactive elements ... were seen as the heart and soul of a participatory process", (Tilakaratna, 1985).

A Sri Lankan peasant summed it all up in these simple words: "the rust in our brains is now removed" (Tilakaratna, 1985).

3. The institutional framework

While discussions, analysis and reflection constitute the methodology of participation promotion in most of the initiatives considered here, the institutional framework provides the vehicle for the practice of participation. As might be expected,

there is a great deal of variation in the organizational arrangements devised by them to conduct their work. However, one common characteristic they share is that in all cases members are organized into base of primary groups. Participatory development is inconceivable in the absence of such groups. The process of conscientization presupposes the existence or creation of small groups with a homogeneous socio-economic background. Beyond that the organization of small farmers, rural workers and urban poor in groups serves a number of crucial functions. First, it provides a forum for dialogue, analysis and reflection, thereby contributing to the capacity of the members to understand and find solutions to their problems. Secondly, membership in a group reduces individual insecurity and dependence and builds confidence. This is a vital function especially in societies characterized by social oppression, economic polarization and status hierarchies. Thirdly, the groups provide a mechanism for discussion, choice and elaboration of social and economic activities to be undertaken on individual or joint basis. Fourthly, they constitute appropriate structures for the launching, ownership, management and operation of some projects. Fifthly, the groups serve to increase the effectiveness of government social and economic services by acting as receiving mechanisms. Sixthly, the formation of groups enables the poor to transform their individual weaknesses into collective strength thus enhancing their bargaining power vis-à-vis other economic groups and exerting countervailing pressure against local power structures.

The group structure of some of the initiatives discussed here illustrates these points. In the GB, groups and the centre hold weekly meetings for banking transactions as also for discussions on other social and economic activities. Although the loan is given to the individual and he or she has ultimate responsibility for it, it must be approved by the group chief and the centre chief. The groups, therefore, assume responsibility for its repayment. The choice of activity financed by the loan is left to the individual and the group. Group pressure plays an important role in ensuring the nearly perfect loan repayment record achieved by the bank. The Group Fund consisting of personal savings and Group Tax for emergency and social security purposes is operated by the groups. Joint enterprises such as shallow and deep tubwells, weaving and rice hullers are owned and managed at the level of individual groups, collection of groups, or centres. Construction, management and running of schools, community halls and other social activities would typically be organized at the level of individual or several centres.

In the SFDP, the group plays a key role in investment decisions. The decisions on individual and joint loans are taken through group discussion and consensus, and the group provides the guarantee for the loan. The monthly meetings of the group also provide occasions for discussion and approval of annual and longer term plans for social and economic activities.

In ORAP, the new emphasis is on base units comprising three to five families. A few of the family units come together to form production units. The activities to be undertaken emerge from discussions within these groups. Some of the projects are of a family nature such as cultivation, latrine and kitchen improvement, but others involve larger units such as irrigation, grain mills, food storage and community buildings. Mutual help and co-operation are organized through the family units or production groups. The Naam groups in the Six-S form the nucleus of a myriad of activities such as water catchment and storage schemes, reforestation, soil preservation, cereal banks, artisanal

production and collective farming. They also operate credit and savings societies, provide guarantees for individual and collective loans, and organize a variety of welfare schemes and social activities. The peasant associations in ADRI constitute the core of the movement. A number of family, community and income-generating projects by peasant groups are gradually transforming themselves into multipurpose co-operatives.

The village groups promoted by PIDA and by Sarilakas seek to raise the living standards of their members through collective action designed to improve wages, secure access to land, reduce the burden of usury, and retain a larger share of surpluses through joint purchase, elimination of middlemen in marketing, etc. In SEWA also exertion of pressure through collective power has been an important element in the benefits derived by its members. In addition to its function as a trade union of self-employed women workers, SEWA has organized members in co-operatives based on occupations. Social insurance, welfare and training programmes have also been organized.

While SEWA and WWF are exclusively women's organizations, GB and SEDP have separate groups for men and women, although SFDP also has a few mixed groups. On the other hand, in the other initiatives while there may some separate groups for men and women, the common pattern is to have mixed groups. This has served to break down stereotypes of gender roles and promoted solidarity and co-operation between sexes and generations.

While participation of members in the activities of the organization through base groups is a feature common to all these grass-roots initiatives, there is a great deal of variation concerning higher level entities. Sarilakas and PIDA essentially act as promoters of self-reliant participatory organizations of the rural poor. The organizations thus formed may co-operate in a variety of ways including joint projects, exchange of visits, information, etc., but so far no attempts have been made to federate them into regional or national associations, although federations have emerged at municipality and provincial levels in Sarilakas and across villages in PIDA. The parent body of the SFDP is the Agricultural Development Bank which does not have any representation from the small farmers in its policy-making organs. While the original intention was to encourage regional and national associations of SFDPs, this has not materialized, although individual groups co-operate in a variety of ways. Essentially, the same remarks apply to the GB with the crucial difference that now 75 per cent of the paid-up share capital belongs to members and the 12-member Board of Directors includes four persons, including preferably two women, elected by the borrower shareholders.

The other organizations have ascending layers of bodies with representatives chosen from lower-level entities. For instance, in ADRI, the peasant groups come together into regional associations which federate into a national organization. Likewise, the ORAP organizational structure moves up from village groups to "umbrellas" to associations and the Advisory Board. WWF and SEWA have representative or general assemblies at the apex. The higher-level bodies consist of representatives elected from the lower ones. Some activities and services may be carried out at higher levels, e.g., the development centres in ORAP are operated at the level of associations and the Solidarity Bank in ADRI is run at the apex as are the savings and credit co-operatives run by SEWA and WWF. Thus in all these cases the organizational structure provides for participation in decision-making by the rank-and-file members of the movement.

D. Self-reliance and the role of outsiders

These initiatives have a diversity of origins. SFDP, PIDA and Sarilakas originated as government programmes with support of international agencies. But PIDA and Sarilakas moved away from their official links to convert themselves into development NGOs. SFDP continue to be run as an ADB project but the bank operates in an independent manner. Although GB started as an experiment by an academic, it has been converted into a bank with joint ownership by the government and the borrowers. It is also run independently of the government ministries. All the other initiatives originated with concerned professionals and social activities independently of official agencies. It is noteworthy that the key figures in the initiation and consolidation of these initiatives were nationals of these countries. This is an aspect of self-reliance which already sets them off from the great majority of development projects which are often conceived and designed by outsiders.

A key characteristic of these initiatives both in their establishment and subsequent expansion is the role played by development workers variously described as social activities, change agents, facilitators, group organizers, catalysts and animators. 8/ The success of these initiatives is in no small measure due to the approach and style of work adopted by these development workers. They do not posses any special technical skills but their human qualities are vital to the success of their mission. These include a deep understanding of the economy and society of the impoverished groups, compassion and sympathy with their plight, ability to inspire trust and confidence and to motivate and guide them, not in a paternalistic and authoritarian way, but in a manner to enhance their confidence and self-reliance. While many initiatives such as for instance the GB, the SFDP and SEWA, continue to rely on a core of professional and administrative staff to run their activities, others such as PIDA and Sarilakas regard their primary objective as being the stimulation of self-reliant participatory organizations. The animators who perform this role are expected to gradually phase out, and internal cadres and animators selected from within the village population to progressively take over their functions. Likewise, it is the policy of WWF to have members of that organization steadily take over as group and area organizers. It was noted earlier that Six-S increasingly relies on peasant-technicians and advanced groups to transmit knowledge and innovations to other members and groups.

Self-reliance has many other aspects and several of these are illustrated by the experiences of the participatory initiatives discussed here. In some ways, the most important element is growing control over economic resources and social environment resulting in greater confidence and reduction in insecurity and dependence, brought about on the one hand by the strength derived from membership of a group and on the other by a steady increase in individual intellectual, moral and technical capabilities. Indeed it is this aspect of their experience that is repeatedly emphasized by members in discussions and evaluations of the impact of the initiatives. Another dimension of self-reliance concerns the mobilization of labour and other resources to launch income-generating activities and infrastructural and service projects. This feature is common to all initiatives but is central to the African experiences.

Provision of credit is the cornerstone of GB and SFDP but plays a role of varying importance in other initiatives as well. It should be noted here that in most cases funds are made available on a loan basis to be repayable over a specified period and at

commercial rates of interest, although the rates are lower than charged by private moneylenders. In cases where a credit programme is a major component of their activities such as SFDP, GB, SEWA and WWF, the default rate is astonishingly low by any standards. This is an eloquent testimony to the self-reliance spirit of these initiatives.

Furthermore, practically all initiatives have instituted other schemes which reinforce their self-reliance. The organization of collective savings for consumption and production loans and for emergency purposes is a common element in all initiatives. The Six-S, ADRI and ORAP have initiated various types of cereal banks to enhance food security. Some groups in ADRI have started schemes which represent the beginnings of a social security system. Similar schemes covering child birth, death, widowhood, etc., have been launched by SEWA and WWF financed completely or partly by the members' contributions.

The high rates of saving and accumulation achieved by many groups in these initiatives is further evidence of their self-reliant approach. In GB, for instance, together with interest payments, Group Fund and Emergency Fund, the members save a minimum of 25 per cent of the income generated by the bank loans. If to this is added savings for special projects and members' personal savings and investment, the savings rate in many cases may well amount to 50 per cent of the additional income. In an extremely poor community where meeting subsistence needs is an everyday struggle, such rates of saving can only be considered phenomenal.

Initiatives such as PIDA and Sarilakas push the concept of self-reliance to extreme limits. PIDA regards its role as assistance in the mobilization of efforts by the rural poor through animation work. It does not provide any technical assistance, extension services, grants or loans. The villagers themselves are expected to enhance their incomes and production and social welfare through collective actions of the type discussed earlier and through staking a claim for their share of resources from the commercial banks and government social and economic services. Even the animation and facilitation work done by external animators is for a limited period to be taken over at the earliest opportunity by internal cadres.

Most of the initiatives discussed here have been recipients of assistance from national, multilateral and bilateral sources. No conventional type of analysis has been undertaken of the effectiveness of this assistance. Except for the two major credit programmes, the assistance received has been relatively modest. It has consisted for the most part of funds to start loan schemes, grants for training programmes, financing of workshops and occasional grants for equipment for production or infrastructural projects. No foreign experts have been attached to these movements nor have they "benefitted" from technical co-operation and consultancy missions. These initiatives thus represent truly authentic indigenous attempts at self-reliant development at the grass-roots level.

E. Participatory initiatives as economic enterprises

The initiatives we have been considering cannot be looked at as conventional development projects. They respond to the multifarious needs of their members. Efforts to improve the living standards of the members are certainly at the core of their concerns and often provide the motivation for the creation of the movement but both the leaders

and the participants also stress objectives which go beyond material achievements. In this section, we discuss some economic aspects – leaving for later sections the social and political dimensions of the work of participatory initiatives. The pattern of economic activities undertaken by them has already been discussed in earlier sections. The intention here is to briefly analyse the nature of these activities and to make a rough assessment of their economic impact.

1. Economic benefits to members

Provision of credit to individual members or to groups, directly or indirectly, plays an important role in all initiatives. Credit facilitates the purchase of stock in trade, raw materials, equipment, tools and agricultural inputs. Especially in densely populated poor countries, capital is an extremely scarce factor of production and carries high potential returns. Its value is further enhanced to the poor as institutional credit is largely unavailable to them and they must rely for urgent needs on moneylenders who impose 5 to 15 times the rates charged by commercial banks. The provision of credit thus contributes to increases in the incomes of the members by financing higher turnover of their stock, improvements in tools and equipment, access to raw materials and inputs, and by substitution of institutional for moneylenders' loans.

While detailed evaluation of economic activities of other initiatives is not available to the author, several surveys have attempted to quantify the economic impact of the credit programme of the GB and SFDP. 9/ There is naturally a good deal of variation in returns on individual activities but overall the investment programme financed by loans generated rates of return in the region of 30 to 40 per cent. Apart from the factors mentioned earlier, the contributory factors in the GB have been that the activities undertaken are familiar to members; the skills and technologies are known and are relatively simple; the clients are not dependent – except in a few cases – on extension services or inputs from the government. Furthermore, the participants themselves select the activities for which they seek loans. It may be assumed that they would select activities which they are confident of carrying out successfully. Group dynamics, emulation, competition and peer pressure are additional factors which have played a positive role in all initiatives of the type considered here.

Similar factors have been at work in the SFDP with the additional point that high yields in its projects have been possible in part because the credit programme has brought within reach of small and marginal farmers the Green Revolution package of improved seeds, irrigation and fertilizers. Impressive income gains to women vendors, hawkers and home-based workers in SEWA and WWF have also been made possible essentially through access to credit. As indicated earlier, the mere substitution of institutional for moneylenders' credit – even disregarding higher turnover, better prices and improved technology - is a source of substantial gains in income. Rough estimates made for SFDP members showed that income gains from this source alone equalled those brought about by increased production.

Another way in which these initiatives have helped increase incomes, production and employment is through pooling of labour and other resources under collective projects such as irrigation and water catchment schemes, solid conservation, reforestation, construction of access roads, cultivation of common plots, mutual help in ploughing and harvesting, food storage, cereal banks, transport, marketing and joint purchase of

agricultural inputs. The list of such efforts is long and impressive. In Africa especially, activities of this nature have contributed to stability and increase in incomes and production, reduction of food insecurity and generation of fuller employment through breaking of infrastructural bottlenecks, overcoming of labour shortages and introduction of improved techniques. Co-operation in pooling resources facilitated by institutional innovations inspired by traditional practices has been at the heart of gains achieved through these initiatives.

The third and related source of gains has accrued from the exertion of collective pressure and power to secure higher wages for jobs and contract work, enforcement of land and tenancy reform, fishing and forestry rights, implementation of the provisions of labour legislation, improved prices for raw materials and for processed foods. These gains have been the result of stronger bargaining and countervailing power as well as of institutional reforms such as service and production co-operatives, collective funds, credit and thrift societies, consumer stores, etc. These aspects have been especially important in the work of PIDA, Sarilakas, WWF and SEWA. This is a reflection of deep-seated social cleavages and economic polarization prevalent in many Asian countries.

Finally, some of these initiatives – especially in South Asia – have contributed to increased incomes through reduction of excessive expenditure on ceremonial occasions. These include dowries, thread, birth and death ceremonies, and festivities of various kinds. Group discussions, solidarity and demonstration provide the necessary support for members to make the radical break from ancient practices. The gains accrue not only from direct reductions in expenditure but, even more importantly, from the savings in servicing of loans incurred by poor people at exorbitant interest rates from moneylenders and landlords – a debt trap from which they are unlikely to escape during their lifetime. Although no precise estimates are available of gains to disposable income from these sources, the rough estimates I made for SFDP members show that – even disregarding the interest charged by moneylenders – the average annual reduction in ceremonial expenditures was equivalent to Rs. 600 to 700 – somewhat more than the gains realized from increases in income due to production loans.

2. Wider economic impact of the initiatives

The final theme under this heading concerns the wider economic impact of the initiatives. It is possible for a programme to confer significant socio-economic benefits on its members while simultaneously generating strong negative effects on other segments of the society. Likewise a project with a mediocre rating in terms of the direct impact on intended beneficiaries may nevertheless generate beneficial indirect and side effects for the poor. All the initiatives considered here are doubly blessed: they bring significant social and economic benefits to members while simultaneously generating positive spill-over effects on the poorer segments of these societies. These wider economic effects may be considered under three heads: the "macro-economic" impact of project activities, assistance given by members to the fellow poor in their area or "technical co-operation at the grass-roots level" and the impact on national programmes and policies.

Although in aggregate terms most of these programmes are of negligible importance, they exercise significant influence at local and regional levels. The macro-economic effects may extend to markets for labour, credit and goods and services. As far as the

labour markets are concerned, the impact of activities undertaken under most initiatives is to intensify utilization of family labour and shift labour allocation from wage to self-employment. This may be due to more intensive cultivation, non-farming activities, access to land, work on infrastructural projects and participation in training and social programmes. The effect is that, while the demand for labour goes up, the supply of wage labour goes down. Other things being equal, this should contribute to an increase in wages for the poor and the unskilled. This indeed seems to have happened in the areas in which SFDP, GB, WWF and SEWA have been active.

Many of the activities launched under these initiatives result in the diversion of bank credit to the rural poor, creation of new credit and savings schemes and substitution of institutional for moneylenders' credit. Thus, by increasing the supply of institu-tional credit and reducing the demand for moneylenders' loans, these initiatives exercise a downward pressure on the terms for non-institutional of credit from moneylenders, traders and landlords, this must be counted among the more important benefits to non-members generated by these initiatives.

Productive activities associated with these initiatives result in increased output and marketing of goods and services consumed by the poverty groups in rural and urban areas. These include such things as rice, maize, vegetables, fruits, meat, milk, eggs, cloth, household utensils, bamboo products, baskets, simple agricultural tools and services such as transport, storage, marketing, shopping, etc. Typically, these are the goods and services of mass consumption and figure prominently in the expenditure patterns of the poor. Although the rise in the incomes of the members results in increased consumption of many of these goods and services, the net effect for most goods is to increase their availability. This in turn, by keeping the relative prices of such commodities lower than they might otherwise be, contributes to an increase in the real incomes of the poorer segments of the society.

The benefits from these initiatives also spread to other poor people through assistance rendered to them by members in a variety of ways. The pioneer groups must be looked upon as constituting a social vanguard whose impact radiates through the neighbouring communities. The members assist the fellow poor to form their own groups. This may happen at the initiative of the members of the established groups or at the request of the non-members who spontaneously with to emulate their efforts. It is possible to quote instances from all the initiatives discussed here of the pioneer groups and animators being besieged by requests from others in the same or neighbouring villages for help in starting similar activities. This is perhaps the most important explanation of the rapid expansion of the membership of many of these organizations. Even where the entire set of activities is not replicated, some aspects of their valuable experiences are quickly disseminated to the neighbouring communities. Indeed the "bush telegraph" is the most effective vehicle of transmission of new ideas, techniques and practices among the peasantry and rural workers. To give some examples, SFDP members helped others with group formation, initiation of social activities and community projects, credit and technical advice. In Khopasi and Jyamire villages, community irrigation projects were started at the initiative of the SFDP groups but non-members in the catchment area were invited to participate in the scheme through donation of labour and cash. The example of betel and coir yarn producers in establishing new marketing channels was swiftly followed by several neighbouring villages.

Likewise, the pioneering efforts of Six-S, ORAP and ADRI have spread rapidly to other parts of the country through demonstration effect and emulation. For example, the Groupement Naam de Somiaga in Burkina Faso helped set up 11 groups in six other villages. For their part 42 villages assisted this group in the construction of a dam. Six-S has developed original methods for transmission of skills through peasant-technicians who are paid by the organization to train other members and groups in new technologies, social innovations and management techniques. The principal vehicle for this is "chantiers-écoles" (training camps) organized on a regular basis during the dry season at the request of the groups. These range from soil conservation techniques to management of maize mills, from water pump maintenance to fenced livestock, and from cereal banks to nutritional centres. Each group assumes the responsibility to pass its special skills to others.

The impact of these initiatives is spreading farther afield. Six-S is already operating in four Sahelian countries and plans are afoot to extend its activities to Niger and Chad. WWF is working in three states in southern India. Sister organizations to SEWA have been set up in about 10 other Indian cities such as Bhopal, Delhi, Lucknow, Mithila and Bhagalpur. Many international seminars, study tours and workshops have been organized around these initiatives. SWAPO cadres have visited ORAP, the GB has attracted visitors from several Asian and African countries and has given technical assistance for organization of credit programmes for the rural poor in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Malawi. Perhaps the most dramatic example of the international impact of these initiatives is the role played by the Managing Director of the Grameen Bank in establishing small-scale credit schemes for the urban poor in Chicago and Arkansas - the latter at the request of the Governor of the State. That the leader of a credit programme for the impoverished masses of one of the poorest countries in the world should be advising on establishing similar programmes in the metropolis of one of the richest countries in the world is indeed a paradox of extraordinary proportions!

Each of these initiatives contains valuable lessons for official development programmes, projects and policies. It is one of the tragedies of the development efforts in our countries that these creative and original efforts at self-reliant development through mobilization of the limited resources of the impoverished groups should have had so little impact on official development thinking and practice, both at national and international levels. Fortunately there are glimmers of hope. By way of example, we may mention that in Nepal the basic concept of credit for the rural poor based on group guarantee has been extended by the ADB/N to other villages where the SFDP is not operating. Likewise many elements of the SFDP - formation of groups, channelling of credit for individual and group activities through the group, investment decisions by the groups have been incorporated partially in several integrated rural development projects in the country. Several women's programmes have also drawn upon the experience gained in the SFDP. Its existence has enhanced the effectiveness of some support services and has put pressure on other institutions such as co-operatives and Agricultural Inputs Corporation to improve their performance.

As another example, we may mention the success achieved by SEWA in projecting the problems of poor self-employed women at the national level. The efforts of the organization have had some impact on thinking and action concerning self-employed workers. After prolonged pressure from SEWA, the Gujarat Government set up the Unorganized Labour Board in 1980. The National Planning Commission added a chapter

on the self-employed in the Sixth Five-year Plan and the Prime Minister has set up a Commission on Self-employed Women which appropriately is chaired by the originator and leader of SEWA.

F. Participatory initiatives as agencies of social reform

The preceding sections have already touched on the role played by the participatory initiatives as instruments of social change. We discuss here four aspects of social progress: provision of social services and cultural amenities, change in family relations, emancipation of women and reform of antiquated and harmful customs and practices. Unlike many other development projects, the initiatives discussed here have integrated social and economic activities in their programmes. In this respect as in others, the leaders and organizers of these associations have simply followed the wishes of their members. ORAP, Six-S and ADRI have a wide range of social and cultural activities such as literacy, schools, nutrition, child care, help for the old and the handicapped, village clinics, personal hygiene, music and dances. WWF organizes literacy classes, night schools for working children, family planning, and nutrition education. SEWA has pioneered social assistance and welfare schemes for maternity, death, widowhood, etc. The social activities of the GB comprise sanitation, health care, nutrition, education and family planning. The performance of the SFDP members has been superior to those of their neighbours in terms of literacy, education, family planning, sanitation and access to health services. It should be remembered that except perhaps for SFDP, the bulk of these social services are organized by the members themselves with contributions in cash and kind.

The second aspect relates to the effect on family solidarity. As mentioned earlier, it is a collective of three to five families which contribute the base units for many of ORAP activities. The involvement of all members of the family on projects of direct benefit to them, serves, to promote family unity and harmony. In Six-S, the traditional Naam groups have brought together the old and the young thus reducing generational tensions and promoting harmony among members of different age groups.

All the initiatives provide for full participation by women in all their activities either in mixed or in their own groups. This is leading to slow but profound changes in the social status and economic position of women, especially in South Asia. Membership in SEWA and WWF has given women, long subjected to subordination and oppression, a new sense of pride, dignity, personal worth and economic independence. All the South Asian initiatives have enabled women to increase their incomes and acquire some organizational and management skills in planning and implementing group activities. In many households, the participation of women in income-generating activities has created a new division of labour and a new pattern of relationships. In some of the households with women members of the GB, it was found that the male members had begun to partake of some of the tasks traditionally done by women, e.g. looking after the children. It was also noted that the economic activities undertaken by women in turn created new opportunities for male members of the family. The women may, for instance, husk rice, make bamboo and cane products, or look after milch cow, while the husbands complement the household economy by buying raw materials, selling processed rice, handicrafts, milk or meat. This has enhanced women's economic independence and social status within the extended family. The husbands and other male members in the household have accepted the new situation willingly and, in some cases, even enthusiastically.

Finally, participation in these organizations is leading to a reform of ancient but antiquated customs and practices. Reference was made earlier to the role played by these organizations in reducing burdensome ceremonial expenditures. More impressive is the progress being made by the initiatives in South Asia in combatting the age-old practice of dowry and child marriages, and caste and ethnic prejudice and discrimination. There is also evidence of decline in drunkenness, gambling, crime, wife-beating and similar types of anti-social behaviour. All this casts an interesting light on the determinants of social attitudes and behaviour. It may be noted that government policies and programmes in many countries have sought for long to bring about precisely this type of change but that once the people are organized in voluntary, co-operative groups and are given the necessary motivation, they decide on their own to carry through social changes of far-reaching significance.

G. Participatory initiatives as schools of democracy

Grass-roots participatory organizations may be regarded as foundations of a democratic society. They promote the democratic cause in at least three ways. First, a representative and pluralistic democracy presupposes that all major social and economic groups in the country have a voice and a role in shaping national policies. For this to be possible, such groups should be able to articulate and press their views on vital issues of concern to them. Typically in most poor countries, and in many rich ones for that matter, the weaker and impoverished groups represented by the landless and marginal farmers in rural areas and the unemployed, casually employed and the poor self-employed in urban areas, have little voice and limited role in influencing government policies on social and economic matters. Given their individual weaknesses, they can exercise pressure and influence only by forming their own organizations.

None of the initiatives considered here has articulated its role in political terms. But it is clear that in practice some at least have come close to representing the interests of their groups in the political and economic processes of their countries. SEWA and WWF have served as pressure groups in the struggle against certain vested interests which have opposed the reforms proposed by them. They have also sought to influence legislation on matters of interest to their members and have deployed their strength in relation to bureaucracy and political parties to promote the interests of their members. Likewise, Sarilakas and PIDA have enabled poor peasants, landless workers and fishermen to exercise their collective strength to enforce legislation, renegotiate contracts and generally enhance their bargaining power.

In some cases the members of these organizations are beginning to play a more direct political role. In Nepal, for instance, it is rare for the small farmers, tenants and sharecroppers to hold offices in co-operatives and ward panchayat (local government) bodies. It is, however, a common sight now in all project areas for SFDP members to participate in such organizations at the village level. To give just one example, in Khopasi, 32 SFDP participants served as ward members, 19 as panchayat members and 3 as members of the Executive Committee of co-operatives out of a total of 9. Likewise in areas where the GB has opened its branches, there has been a perceptible increase in the influence and power exerted by its members in the village affairs.

The second way in which these initiatives serve the democratic cause is simply by providing an example of an embryonic democracy at work. In the section on the institutional framework of grass-roots initiatives, it was noted that base groups constitute the core of their organizations. These groups are generally run in an open democratic manner. The style of work is through discussions and dialogue and decision is reached through consensus. Some of the groups have devised original solutions to the problems faced by organizations as democratic entities at all levels, namely those of accountability of leadership, prevention of concentration of power in the hands of office-holders and active participation by all members in the management of group activities. The betel producers, for instance, decided to limit the size of their membership to ensure that all members participate actively in and effectively control the economic activities of the group. The requests for additional membership were handled by assisting them in forming new groups of their own. The insistence on keeping the members of the group to a manageable size is also characteristic of other initiatives. The Six-S and ADRI groups seek to prevent perpetuation of hierarchical division of labour by rotating the tasks among members. Office-bearers are chosen by election for limited periods. Some groups elect a different person to preside at each meeting. These organizations, therefore, promote the habit of group discussion, consultation, planning and implementation of joint activities, and resolution of conflict through debate - qualities which constitute the foundations of a participatory democracy.

Thirdly, the grass-roots initiatives aid the democratic processes in poor countries by developing the intellectual, moral, managerial and technical capabilities of their members. This aspect has been discussed at length above. Suffice it to say here that in the last analysis it is these human capabilities which are the ultimate determinants of the vitality and creativity of a truly democratic society.

Some concluding observations

In this paper we have attempted to analyse the significance, processes and characteristics of participatory development through an examination of the experiences of a few grass-roots initiatives in Asian and African countries. In the concluding section we touch on the strengths and limitations of participatory grass-roots initiatives as models of development. But before addressing this issue, it is necessary to make some qualifying remarks on the initiatives analyzed in this paper.

The analysis presented here has been necessarily selective, highlighting distinctive features nd notable achievement of nine participatory initiatives. As such it has undoubtedly given an optimistic, perhaps idealistic, picture of the functioning of such initiatives. It is necessary to emphasize first that the initiatives considered here are among the most successful of numerous similar efforts under way in third world countries. Secondly, there is a great deal of variation in the quality of performance between and within the different units of the initiatives discussed here. Thirdly, the account presented above has not discussed the many difficulties, setbacks and frustrations suffered by these initiatives. It is necessary to point out that these movements had to overcome a wide variety of problems at some stage or another and continue to face difficulties of organization, finance, know-how, staff and opposition or indifference from certain vested interests.

Despite these difficulties, the grass-roots initiatives considered here have achieved a wide measure of success. It may be useful to summarize what appear to have been the major contributory factors to their success. There are three elements in the participatory character of these initiatives which probably have contributed strongly to their good performance: work in the preparatory phase prior to initiation of activities, an institutional frame which allows for an assertion of members' priorities in the unfolding of the activities undertaken and the formation of groups as a basic unit in the organization. These features in turn owe much to the approach and human qualities of the leaders of these movements and their band of dedicated development workers.

Relatively quick positive results in terms of the satisfaction of the psychological and material needs of the members have been important in sustaining interest and commitment. The material achievements in the Asian initiatives flowed in large measure from provision of credit and the wresting of a larger share of surpluses through enhanced bargaining power and co-operative activities, and in African experiences from co-operation in mobilization of internal resources and attraction of outside funds for production diversification, infrastructural development and technological innovations. The organizational framework adopted facilities mobilization of labour and other resources, institution of schemes for collective savings, social security, and provision of social and economic services. At the same time, it allows for the initiation of activities of different sizes and with different modes of production and systems of management. Finally, these experiences demonstrate that a pattern of development rooted in grass-roots participatory organizations, while giving full play to individual and group initiatives, promotes a relatively egalitarian distribution of incomes and access to common services and facilities.

Despite its promising potential, the participatory approach to development has made little headway in official programmes and policies at the national or international levels. Even among the non-governmental initiatives, the success rate is relatively low. A full discussion of this apparent paradox cannot be undertaken here, but some of the relevant considerations may be noted. In the first place, the participatory approach to development is relatively new and few in the "development establishment" have proper knowledge or full understanding of it. Secondly, as noted in section A above, many apparently participatory programmes provide little more than token representation of the "beneficiaries" and thus fail to arouse their interest or commitment. Thirdly, participatory approach, especially in its empowerment version, tends to be mistakenly equated by the dominant groups with subversive or revolutionary doctrine. As such many participatory initiatives have to contend with hostility, harassment and attempts at suppression. Certainly, relatively few attract resources of the type and amount reserved for more conventional development projects.

There are some additional difficulties which are perhaps inherent in a participatory approach. The pace and pattern of activities may evolve slowly and haltingly and in directions different from those envisaged initially. The initiatives are often of a limited size and dependent for their success on the leadership of an exceptional person and a small band of dedicated social activists. It is, therefore, difficult to replicate them on a nation-wide basis. Furthermore, while successful in handling simple operations, they lose their effectiveness when confronted with large-scale complex activities. Their expansion beyond a certain size is likely to provoke the antagonism of more powerful forces. There is some validity in these charges but the experience of some of the

initiatives has refuted a few of them. It would, however, require a separate paper to do full justice to these issues.

NOTES

1/ This article represents an effort to introduce to a wider audience a little known but particularly interesting and promising approach to development. Its knowledge and discussion has so far been confined to a narrow band of "insiders". Being myself an outsider to the "movement", it is perhaps necessary to enter a personal note at the outset. My interest in the participatory approach to development goes back at least to the mid-1970s when I was in charge of the preparatory work for the World Employment Conference convened by the ILO in 1976. Subsequently, as Chief of the Rural Employment Policies Branch, I initiated work on participatory organizations of the rural poor (PORP). This work at ILO was co-ordinated by Md Anisur Rahman.

UNRISD, which I joined in September 1987 as Director, has also undertaken an impressive research effort on participation with emphasis on "the nature of people's participation, the conditions conducive to participation and the organizational structures which evolve to sustain it". The research programme has resulted in the publication of 12 books and a large amount of related material on social movements such as peasant associations, trade unions, protest groups, women's organizations and co-operatives. Currently an effort is under way to provide a synthesis of this vast material. The present article, however, is based largely on the work carried out under the PORP project in ILO.

Although an "outsider" to the movement, I have been fortunate over the past decade and a half to visit and hold discussions with peasant groups, their leaders, social activists and sympathetic government officials in at least 17 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Of the nine grass-roots initiatives examined here, I have visited the Small Farmers' Development Project, the Grameen Bank, Sarilakas and the Working Women's Forum. In addition, I have been privileged to have discussions with the leaders or key figures of all the initiatives.

I acknowledge my debt to the numerous but anonymous peasants and landless workers, both men and women, leaders of peasant groups, social activists and sympathetic officials who have deepened my understanding of the social reality of the impoverished masses in rural areas of the third world. My greatest intellectual debt is to Anisur Rahman and colleagues who participated in the PORP programme. These include S. Tilakaratna, Orlando Fals Borda, Ela Bhatt, Philippe Egger, Justin Maeda, Alula Abate, Muhammed Yunus, Jaya Arunachalam, Nandini Azad, Ponna Wignaraja, Santiago Roca, Edel Guiza, Sithembiso Nyoni, Bernard Ledea Ouedraogo and Shriram Upadhyaya.

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2/ At least one author has made the brave effort to explore the implications of participatory development at all these different levels: see Gran (1983).

3/ Among numerous treatments of this subject, three may be mentioned here: Dag Hammarskjold Foundation (1975), Sen (1983), Wahidul and others (1977).

4/ A more restricted definition but along similar lines has been given by Sen (1983): "The process of economic development can be seen as a process of expanding the capabilities of people."

5/ For an extended discussion of the role of local institu-tions in development projects, see Uphoff (1986).

6/ The classic work on conscientization is Freire (1972); see also Rahman (1985) and Fals Borda (1985).

7/ Sawadogo and Ouedraogo (1978) described this approach in these words: "C'est ainsi que nous animons les groupes-cibles en fonction de ce qu'ils sont, de ce qu'ils savent, de ce qu'ils vivent, de ce qu'ils savent faire, et de ce qu'ils veulent."

8/ The issue of self-reliance in relation to animators is addressed in Tilakaratna (1987).

9/ These have been summarized in my evaluations of GB (Ghai, 1984a) and SFDP (Ghai, 1984b). All subsequent information on these initiatives is taken from these sources.

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